

Statement of U.S. Representative Edward J. Markey (D-MA)
Ranking Democrat, House Telecommunications Subcommittee
Markup of "Dot Kids" Domain Name Legislation
March 6, 2002

Good Afternoon. I want to commend Chairman Upton for calling this markup today on legislation introduced by Subcommittee colleague John Shimkus and myself to create a "dot kids" domain.

As many parents today know, the Internet often appears to be a veritable jungle of web sites. When a child logs on to search for games, stories, or educational material, search engines often turn up pages for the kids laden with pornography, violence or other content that is simply not appropriate for young children. To give children their own playground on the Internet, and to facilitate the easier browsing and filtering of content that many parents desire, we have introduced H.R. 3833, the "Dot Kids Implementation and Efficiency Act."

This bill directs the Department of Commerce, through the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) to accelerate the creation of a "dot kids" domain by making it a secondary domain under our nation's country code top level domain, which is "dot us." The Department of Commerce awarded a contract last October to authorize private sector management and commercialization of "dot U.S." Therefore, what we are talking about here today is the creation of a place on the Internet for websites that end in "dot kids-dot U.S."

The proposed "dot kids" domain will be a cyberspace sanctuary for content that is suitable for kids under 13 and will be an area devoid of content that is harmful to such minors.

I want to address at this point, very briefly, some of the free speech concerns that any endeavor of this type will inevitably raise. First let me emphasize how this approach departs from previous Congressional activity in this policy area.

First, the proposed legislation will not subject all of the Internet communications to a "harmful to minors" standard. If you're in Tennessee, Taiwan, or Timbuktu you can publish or speak any content you want on the Internet. This proposal doesn't affect your ability to do so on a "dot com," "dot net," "dot org" or anywhere else. This proposal now only addresses a subset of Internet commerce – the "dot us" space.

Moreover, it doesn't even curtail speech throughout the entirety of the "dot us" country code domain. If you're in Providence, Rhode Island or Provo, Utah, under this bill you are free to exercise your constitutional rights and this bill contains no proposal that would subject anyone utilizing the "dot us" space to a standard suitable only to kids. Speech more appropriate for adults or teenagers will not be affected by this bill and can appear elsewhere in the "dot us" domain. The bill solely stipulates that if you want to operate in the "dot kids" area – a subset of the "dot us" country code domain – you have entered a kid-friendly zone – a green light district if you will – where the content is suitable for children 12 and under.

And finally, let me note that there is no requirement that anyone utilize that space. Signing up for a "dot kids" domain – and parents sending their kids to websites in that location – remains completely voluntary and the free choice of both speakers and parents.

Again, this proposal simply creates an area where suitable speech for children 12 and under can exist yet inappropriate speech for that age group is free to exist anywhere else.

Thank you and I again want to thank Chairman Upton for the markup and I look forward to continue working with the Chairman, as well as Chairman Tauzin, Ranking Member Mr. Dingell, Mr. Shimkus and our other colleagues as we move forward.

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